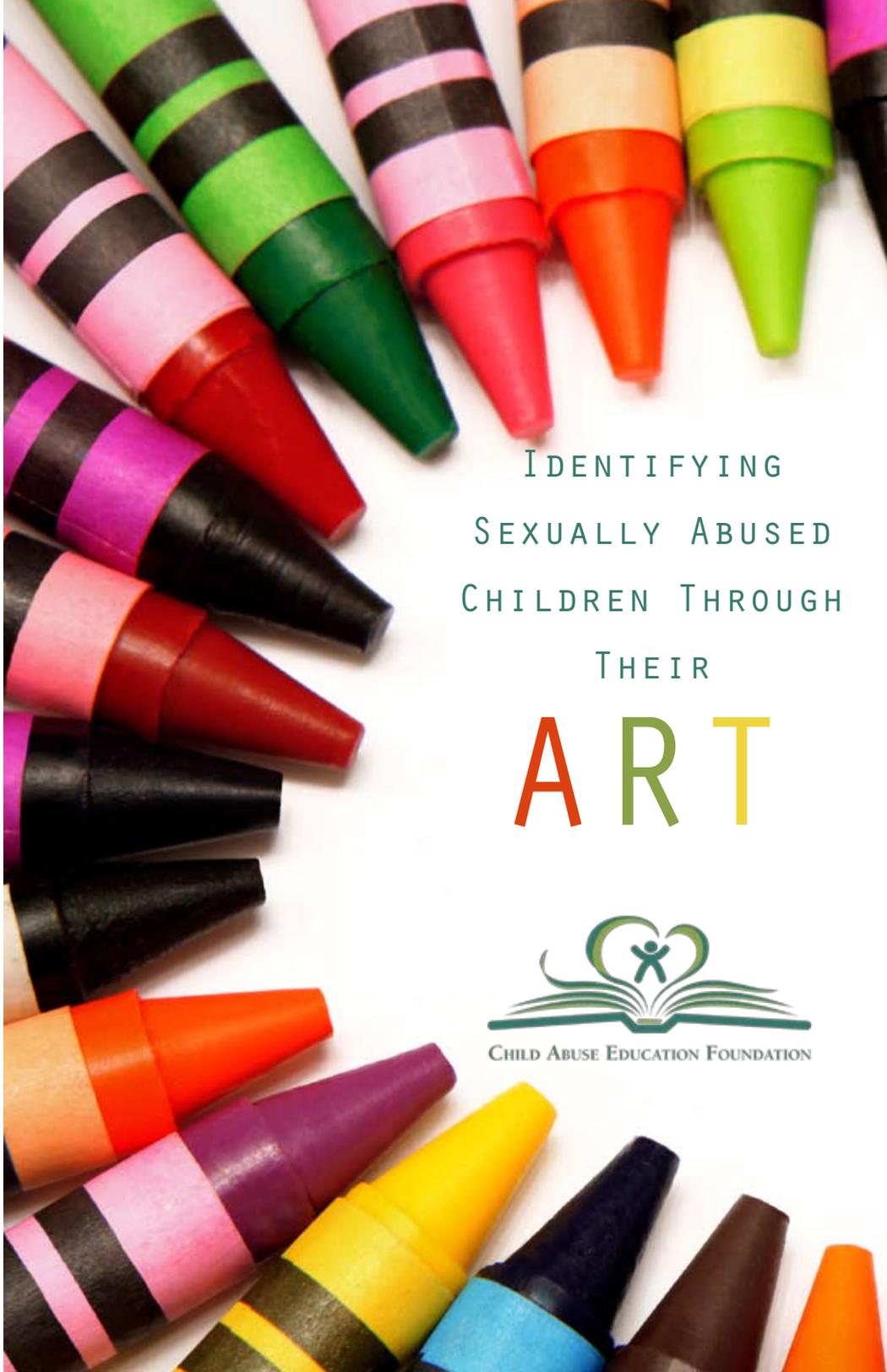




CHILD ABUSE EDUCATION FOUNDATION

Child Abuse Education Foundation of WI, Inc.  
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IDENTIFYING  
SEXUALLY ABUSED  
CHILDREN THROUGH  
THEIR  
ART



CHILD ABUSE EDUCATION FOUNDATION



The Child Abuse Education Foundation of WI, Inc. exists to prevent child abuse by educating child care professionals, teachers, social workers and law enforcement about the early identification, reporting and investigation of physical and sexual abuse of children.



## CONTACT US

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# ABOUT SCOTT NEUBAUER

Scott Neubauer has been a lecturer at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater since the fall semester of 2006. He currently teaches Criminal Investigation and Criminal Investigation of Child Abuse. In addition to his teaching, Scott works for the Child Abuse Education of Wisconsin Foundation, giving presentations on child abuse throughout Wisconsin, Michigan and Illinois. Scott has 35 years experience in Law Enforcement, the last 22 years serving as Chief of Police in Palmyra, WI. He holds a bachelor's of science in Criminal Justice from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and a master's degree in Public Administration from the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh. He is a life member of the Wisconsin Chiefs of Police Association and the 2004 Victim's Advocacy Award winner for his child abuse investigations and presentations.

For the last ten years Scott has been traveling the state of Wisconsin and beyond giving talks on identifying child abuse. It is common when giving talks to elementary and early childhood teachers for them to bring up specific concerns about past and present students. One of the most frequently asked questions is: Do we have enough information to report child abuse? Unlike physical abuse, where the black eyes and bruises are an obvious giveaway, the signs of sexual abuse are more difficult to identify. Scott has always used the following list of "red flags," or indicators, to identify sexually abused children:

- ▶ Frequent masturbation
- ▶ Toilet training regression
- ▶ Children touching other children's private parts
- ▶ Non-age appropriate sexual knowledge
- ▶ Dramatic mood changes
- ▶ Uncharacteristic rage
- ▶ Self-mutilation

# RED FLAGS TO IDENTIFY ABUSE

## Frequent Masturbation

On the surface one might assume that frequent masturbation in a young child is easily identified. After giving talks to hundreds of day care workers, however, we have learned that it is not uncommon for children with diaper rash to reach down their pants to scratch it. We have also been told that it is common for some children to sleep with their hand tucked into the waistband of their pants. Such rational behavior and explanations make this indicator more difficult to identify.

## Toilet Training Regression

When a toilet-trained child suddenly has accidents, and there is no medical cause, it is a strong indicator of abuse. I have investigated cases where children as old as 15 started to wear diapers again for seemingly mysterious reasons, only to learn they were sexually abused. Unfortunately, Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) compliance means that medical information may be withheld, making this indicator difficult to identify as well.

## Children Touching Other Children's Private Parts

Experts now agree that children under the age of five who are the victims of child abuse have substantially more difficulty dealing with their victimization. We believe that sexual contact is a learned behavior and when children are inappropriately touching playmates we have an indicator that the child might have been abused.

## Non-Age Appropriate Sexual Knowledge

Children under the age of five do not understand that they are being sexually abused. They will, however, report it to someone when it hurts or because they don't like something, such as oral sex. Children using slang terms for sex acts is a valid identifier of sexual abuse, since they have no reason for knowing such terms otherwise.

## Dramatic Mood Changes/Uncharacteristic Rage

In Scott's research involving 30 sexually abused boys he found a 1,000 percent increase in violent crimes committed by the victims of sexual abuse over a control group (of non-abused boys). Scott did similar research on girls and again found a 1,000 percent increase in violent crime over a similar control group. Unfortunately, anger and acting out is a byproduct of abuse. Most victims demonstrate unexplained anger or rage, but some also become sullen and withdrawn due to feelings of shame, fear and confusion. The key to identification is the suddenness of the personality change.

## Self-Mutilation

Our final red flag for child sexual abuse is self-mutilation. While it may seem self-explanatory, self-mutilation can be the sign of a number of problems not related to sexual abuse. As such, it should not be used as a sole indicator.

## Parental Red Flags

How many red flags justify making a report of sexual abuse? More importantly, how many signs will a police officer or social worker need to start an investigation? To supplement any red flags collected from observing the children, we have also compiled a list of red flags for when parents are suspected of sexually abusing their children:

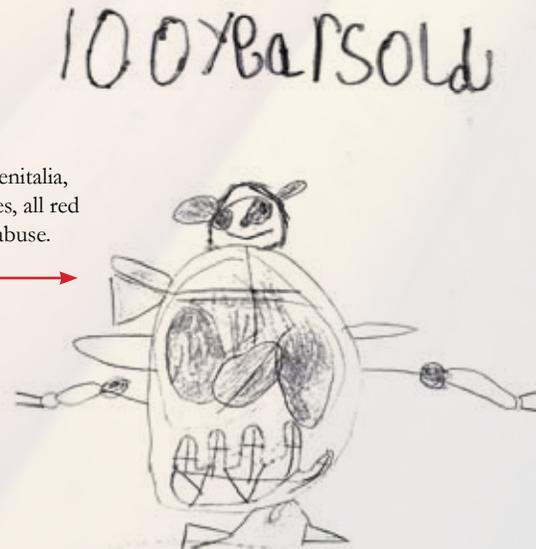
- ▶ Parents move frequently non-job related
- ▶ Parents blame sexual knowledge on siblings
- ▶ Parents have previous arrests for child abuse
- ▶ Parents have prior arrests for drug or alcohol abuse

Professionals that work with children are not good at substantiating child abuse the first time an allegation is made. When there are repeat allegations, we do much better with believing the child or children. In order to avoid repeat allegations and investigations, parents who abuse their children will often make excuses, blame someone else, or move. Backgrounds on parents living in Wisconsin can easily be checked using the automated circuit court records system web site: [wcca.wicourts.gov](http://wcca.wicourts.gov).

# CHILD ABUSE & ART THERAPY

In 2006 Scott investigated a complaint from a local elementary school about a third grade girl who repeatedly exposed her genitalia to fellow classmates during class and at recess. During the investigation, a counselor at the school suggested Scott look at a drawing done by the girl's five-year-old brother. When Scott saw the drawing (below), he knew the child was being sexually abused. His abuser turned out to be his older sister, who was in turn abused by her father. With the cooperation of the school district Scott had the 3rd and 4th grade children, including the little girl, complete drawings of houses and persons. Scott's objective was to see if the abused girl's drawings would be revealing of her abuse, as her brother's drawing was. He wanted to know, given a set of known indicators, if we can differentiate a sexually abused child's drawings from her classmates'. And can we use these drawings to supplement the other red flag indicators of abuse discussed earlier, since many of those indicators are difficult to easily identify?

## 5 YEAR OLD BROTHER'S DRAWING



This drawing includes genitalia, use of hearts and wedges, all red flag indicators of child abuse.

For the past two years, students at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater and Scott have been studying art therapy as it relates to sexually abused children. From our research we have compiled and simplified a list of sexual abuse indicators found in art and compared that list to our collection of drawings done by the 3rd and 4th graders in our control group (minus drawings done by known victims of sexual abuse).

Houses	Control %
Smoke from chimneys	31%
No doors	2%
Rain	1%
Dark clouds	0%
<b>People</b>	
Inclusion of genitalia (sexualized)	0%
Lack of hands	5%
Excessive use of hearts	5% (1 EACH)
Excessive use of wedges	0%
Aggressive face (growling)	1%
Sad and crying face	0%
Self loathing	0%
130 HOUSES	131 PEOPLE

The percentages above demonstrate how often children who are not abused (the control group) draw the listed indicators. For example, only 2% of the control group's pictures featured houses without doors. This means that children who are not abused typically do not draw houses without doors. Children who are abused, however, are more likely to include this indicator in a drawing.

Judging from the percentages above, we can see that not all indicators of sexual abuse found in children's art should be given equal weight. As such, the indicators were broken down into two categories:

- ▶ Red flags or stand alone indicators - observed in 2% or less of the control group drawings
- ▶ Yellow flags or indicators that require more than one observed element - observed in 5% or more of the control drawings

For example, we found that some 3rd and 4th grade children simply cannot draw hands so they don't include them in their drawings. This makes "lack of hands" a yellow flag indicator, requiring some other indicator to be present for it to be significant. None of our control group children, however, drew sad or crying faces, making these red flag indicators.

When the indicators above are compared to drawings done by sexually abused children, one frequently finds more than one indicator in the drawings.

## NO DOORS



The lack of doors on this house is a red flag. This drawing also has smoke coming from the chimney, a yellow flag. Drawn by a 3rd grade sexual abuse victim.

## RAIN



Draw by a 4th grade girl who was sexually abused by her father. It contains rain, an element that children in this age bracket do not typically draw. It also has wedges – the borders on each side of the house. Wedges are triangular objects that can take the form of arrows, weapons, or unwelcoming borders, as is the case here..

## SAD OR CRYING FACES



Drawn by a 3rd grade girl who was a victim of sexual abuse. This drawing has not only a crying face but also depicts genitalia, both red flag indicators..

## EXCESSIVE USE OF HEARTS



\*Malchiodi (1997), p. 154  
Hearts can be in the form of traditional Valentine's Day hearts (above), or the shape of an actual heart as depicted in the first drawing by the five-year-old brother. A single heart is a yellow flag; more than one heart, as depicted in this drawing, is a red flag.

## SELF-LOATHING



Drawn by a 3rd grade girl sexually abused by her father. In addition to the target over her that depicts the self-loathing, this drawing also includes the use of wedges (the arrow) and genitalia (directly above the shaft of the arrow).

## SEXUALIZED DRAWINGS



3

\*Malchiodi (1997), p. 156  
In addition to the sexualized female, this drawing also has the excessive use of hearts. Drawn by female victim of sexual abuse.

# AGGRESSIVE OR GROWLING FACES



Drawn by a sexually abused 4th grade girl. It depicts the aggressive or growling face on both figures, and is also an example of storm clouds, a second red flag indicator.

We compiled a total of 40 drawings in four categories: 3rd grade houses, 4th grade houses, 3rd grade persons, and 4th grade persons. Of those 40 drawings, nine were done by sexually abused children.

We then tested college students at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater in both entry level and advanced classes. The students were broken into two groups: control (untrained) and trained. The control group was simply shown the drawings on PowerPoint slides for ten seconds and asked to indicate whether or not they thought a sexually abused child did each drawing. The second group received training for approximately 50 minutes - training similar to the information found in this publication.

An independent -samples t test comparing the mean scores of the trained and control groups found a significant difference between the mean number of pictures correctly identified between the two groups ( $t(410) = -12.755, p < .01$ ). The mean of the trained group was significantly higher ( $m = 84.28, sd = 9.66$ ) than the mean of the control group ( $m = 71.28, sd = 10.37$ ). This means the trained group (correct 84.28% of the time) was significantly better at identifying whether or not a child was abused through his/her artwork than the control group (correct 71.28% of the time).

We decided to further break down the research into four specific categories to determine the training's effectiveness. In the category of third grade houses the control group correctly identified the pictures 72.70% of the time (on average) while the trained group averaged 90.34% ( $t(410) = -13.519, p < .01$ ). In the third grade people drawings we saw a similar result: the control group correctly identified 80.88% of the pictures and the trained group correctly identified 90.23% of the pictures ( $t(410) = -7.441, p < .01$ ). Similarly, the trained group (79.92% correct) was better at identifying whether or not a house drawn by a fourth grader was done by an abused child more often than the control group (66.49% correct) ( $t(410) = -8.964, p < .01$ ). For pictures of people drawn by fourth grade students, the trained group identified the drawings correctly 76.63% of the time while the control group identified drawings correctly only 65.07% of the time ( $t(410) = -7.224, p < .01$ ).

While the training significantly improved a person's ability to correctly identify whether or not a picture was drawn by an abused child, it was more successful when the artwork demonstrating abuse was drawn by a third grade student. We believe this result may have occurred because our main test subject (the girl who was sexually abused by her father) began receiving counseling at the end of her third grade year. The counseling she received may be why the indicators present in her drawings became more discrete, and thus more difficult to identify.

We also gave our test to 49 daycare workers. The day care workers were able to correctly identify whether or not the artist of a given picture was abused 86.17% of the time. We believe their scores may be higher than those of the tested college students because they have a more vested professional interest in children.

# STATISTICS FOR RECOGNITION OF ABUSE

During our testing we found that there is a wide range of artistic talent displayed in the drawings of 3rd and 4th graders. Some of the more unusual drawings were consistently misidentified as being drawn by abused children, even if they had none of the indicators for sexual abuse discussed above. Those false positives were consistently less in our trained group.

In some of these more unusual drawings, where there were no indicators, knowledge of the children and their home environment can provide explanations. In the first drawing immediately above, the child wrote, "Stay out please!" This is not one of the discussed indicators, and can be explained by the fact that the child's family just had a baby who was sleeping in the bedroom. In the second drawing above, the child is attempting to represent himself as a cowboy - he lives in a rural area where people commonly ride horses.

Since there was a substantial range of artistic talent among our 3rd and 4th grade control group in both the person and house drawings, we asked a graduate of the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design to review our 261 drawings. She is an experienced judge of elementary art contests, and chose the following as a representation of the range in artistic talent at these ages.



# CHILDREN'S ART SHOULD NOT BE USED AS A STAND-ALONE METHOD TO IDENTIFY SEXUALLY ABUSED CHILDREN.

It is designed as a tool to be used when other previously listed indicators exist and confirmation of abuse is being sought:

- ▶ Frequent masturbation
- ▶ Toilet training regression
- ▶ Children touching other children's private parts
- ▶ Non-age appropriate sexual knowledge
- ▶ Dramatic mood changes
- ▶ Uncharacteristic rage
- ▶ Self-mutilation

According to the book "Recognition of Child Abuse for the Mandated Reporter" (Giardino, A. & Giardino, E.; 2002) children under the age of five who are sexually abused have substantially more difficulty dealing with their victimization than older children. They initially don't understand that they have been abused. My experience has been that over 50% of these sexual abuse victims - unlike teen victims - go on to become abusers themselves. We need to get these children help. My research in "The Relationship Between Child Sexual Abuse and Criminal Activity" demonstrates that when children who are sexually abused do not get the help they need, there are devastating effects that last a lifetime. The good news is that we can turn abused children around by getting them help. The first step is identifying the abuse. Please take advantage of our research. Look at the art of a child whom you suspect might have been abused. If you see the signs of abuse, immediately start the healing process for that child and report it to the police and social services.

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